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FOREWORD

We at the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) have long believed that reading is an indispensable key to unlocking the door to children’s dreams and unlimited potential. Our CDF Freedom Schools® program is grounded in a literature-rich environment and reading curriculum centered on excellent books that reflect a wide variety of cultures, races, and experiences. For some children, it is the first time they have seen books with characters who look like them. Our goal is to help children fall in love with reading, so much so they respond with comments such as, “I enjoyed learning about my history.” “That [book] really inspired me because he came from a rough neighborhood.” “Freedom Schools taught me when I learn, I can have fun with it. It made me a better reader because I can understand things.” “I see myself, and the books give me hope.”

All children deserve to fall in love with the power of the written word to transport them to new worlds and teach them new ideas, and to experience what writer Pat Mora has called *bookjoy*. Yet too many children miss out on that opportunity. In fact, far too many children cannot read at all. The majority of all children in the United States and nearly three-quarters of our Black and Latino children can’t read at grade level. They are being sentenced to social and economic death in our rapidly globalizing world. A 21-year-old student teacher described the connection between an inability to read and entrapment in our nation’s dangerous pipeline to prison: “If you can’t read by third grade, you don’t want anyone to know you can’t read, so you act out. When you act out, you get grouped with the other kids



who act out. They can't read [either]. Because no one can read and no one discusses that they can't read, they end up becoming part of gangs, and everyone there is there for the same reason."

No child deserves to have the doors to the "world of possible" slammed shut. So I am profoundly grateful for this new book. In *Every Child a Super Reader*, Pam Allyn and Dr. Ernest Morrell share lessons that will help educators and parents everywhere enable more children to become proficient readers. Their book shows how developing every child's confidence, courage, and hope is vital for learning; showcases the transformational power of literacy in a child's life; describes how to create the kinds of safe and supportive learning environments that exclude no child; promotes equity, opportunity, and the chance for every child to be heard; embraces multicultural children's literature and the power of storytelling as a pathway to academic, social, and civic development; and connects the in-school work of literacy education to homes, families, and out-of-school contexts in order to immerse children in a rich, joyful, literate environment brimming with books and conversation about books 365 days a year.

We *can* create this world for all our children. *Every Child a Super Reader* provides a blueprint for nurturing the engaged and fluent readers we want all of our children to be. In the process, we will transform children's lives and life chances.

—**MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN**
President, Children's Defense Fund

INTRODUCTION

THIS CHILD IS A SUPER READER

“For these are all our children.”

—JAMES BALDWIN

You know this child. She is wearing her superhero outfit, with cape and goggles, hair sticking up. She’s running around the playground, powered by sheer joy and believing 1,000 percent she can change the world.

You also know this child. He sits in the back of the classroom, dreaming his dreams, wishing for a bigger, stronger, bolder voice. Although he wants his ideas to be heard, he does not raise his hand.

And you know this child, too—the one moving more slowly than her classmates, preoccupied, a lot on her mind, her backpack burgeoning, spilling papers.

All children are full of hopes and dreams. Yet too often challenges get in their way. The school day can be long and hard for them, and time out of school can be even longer and harder.

How can we truly tap into the superpowers inside each and every child? How can we create a world for children in which they can raise their voices and become empowered as readers, writers, and thinkers? How can we tap into children’s strengths—strengths that make them strong, confident, and curious during class, during out-of-school time, and back at home? By bringing out the super reader within them.

Super reading transforms, exhilarates, provokes, and inspires. It is the kind of reading that empowers children to feel at ease in any setting, to explore, to share ideas. It is the kind of reading that changes children’s lives and, by doing so, changes the world.

For that to happen, though, we need to offer children “surround sound” reading. We need to give them the time and space to read like a super reader every day of the week, every week of the month, every month of the year, in school and out of school. By focusing on their strengths, we help them build a super reader life.

Super readers have questions that light fires within them. They understand the complexities of a problem and embrace them. Yet too many children never receive the kind of teaching that brings out the super reader within them. Let’s change that right now. This is our time. All children can and should be empowered by reading because reading is, by its very nature, empowering.

“We need to offer children ‘surround sound’ reading. We need to give them the time and space to read like a super reader every day of the week, every week of the month, every month of the year, in school and out of school.”

Let us teach every child how to live like a reader and to use reading as a superpower to elevate her mind, spirit, and overall sense of well-being. Through the gift of reading, we give this child the chance to be in the world—a world that she makes her own, where she never feels alone, 365 days a year.

When we raise and teach a super reader, we are not simply showing him how to decode at the speed of light, or turn pages quickly, or finish a book in record time (though those may be by-products of raising and teaching super readers). We are teaching him how to become a reader. How to live like a reader. We must always remember, reading is not only about what the child does when he reads, but also what reading does for the child.

Reading today is about reading widely and voluminously across many media, genres, and experiences. Reading online or print text is not an either/or paradigm. Children are growing up in a complex, blended world where reading in every mode and on multiple platforms is more essential than ever. We must embrace that fact if we want children to become super readers. If we want them to experience the visceral joy and power of reading.

This book will help you create the kind of strength-based communities that build a hunger and passion for reading. It will help you to create environments that honor choice and voice in the child’s reading life and to create easy-to-implement structures that make it possible for all of us, as teachers, out-of-school educators, and parents, to unleash the child’s inner super reader.



The super reader is powered by sheer joy, by a feeling of belonging to a reading community, by her own strengths, and by an understanding of the power of those strengths.

Consider this book a call to action to launch a super reader community, from school to after school to home and back again. A community in which we all raise our voices, hearts, and minds to help every child become a super reader who can change the world—and will.

Why This Book?

Whether you're a classroom teacher, out-of-school educator, reading specialist, literacy coach, librarian, or school administrator, this book gives you the information and inspiration you need to turn all children into super readers.

Our goal is to help you create an equitable and richly accessible reading community, where every child can learn the skills of reading and feel safe taking risks as a reader.

Foundational skills, such as decoding, gaining phonemic awareness, and learning academic vocabulary, are crucial to the child's reading process, but they must be taught within a purposeful context. Children need to be taught why it's important to read—and have clear reasons to read—if they're going to learn how to read well. It is that purposeful context that has been missing in many of our classrooms and out-of-school programs, and so we address it head-on in this book.

The 7 Strengths Model, described in Chapter 2, helps you build that context. It recognizes the child's social-emotional development as an essential, often overlooked key to successful reading outcomes. Our social-emotional framework—created with children's intra- and inter-personal skills at its heart—builds a safe and loving environment in which to cultivate forever-learners who are excited and ready for their futures in a college, career, and civic life.

The model is an asset-based, strength-based model that centers on what children can do. It relies on children's understandings of themselves as learners, high-quality children's literature, and the research-based benefits of social-emotional learning. When children:

- feel a sense of belonging in a community of readers
- satisfy curiosity through literature and informational texts
- form meaningful friendships that provide support for learning
- learn kindness to reach out to other readers and be world-changers
- develop confidence to get through the hard parts of reading
- build courage for risk-taking in literacy learning
- cultivate a spirit of hopeful optimism for achievement of reading goals

they are far more likely to become super readers who can read across platforms, across genres, in any circumstance, and for any purpose.



The California Department of Education created a set of standards for English learners. In part, it reads:

Offer students opportunities to interact deeply, as readers and writers, with a range of high-quality texts—different types, genres, topics, disciplines, lengths, and complexities—that ignite their interests, build their knowledge, touch their hearts, and illuminate the human experience (2015).

This vision sets us on a path to a new era—an era in which we ignite interests, build knowledge, touch hearts, and illuminate the human experience. This is what we want for all children, for they deserve nothing less. The deficit-oriented labels we have historically given children have long-lasting, detrimental effects. Instead of talking about super readers, we have talked more about “problem readers,” “struggling readers,” and even “non-readers.” Instead of talking about a world of possible, we have talked about barriers to reading achievement.

Too many children are not thriving as readers in school or out of school. Research shows that children who are reading below level by third grade are four times as likely to drop out of high school than those who have reached proficiency. While reading scores in general are low across the country, children from low-income households make up nearly 75 percent of the population reading below the 25th percentile (Reardon, 2011).

Learning to Read: What Every Child Needs

Learning to read is typically defined as learning to control a specific set of skills. And while it’s certainly true that children must learn to orchestrate a complex set of strategic actions that enable comprehension and decoding, it’s equally true that learning to read is a social-cultural event. In other words, learning to read is more than simple skill building. Children also become readers when they are immersed in a community of readers, surrounded by rich book talk and animated demonstrations of reading, and provided with the social-emotional support that enables them to become members of the “literacy club” (Smith, 1987). Thus, at the same time we’re helping students acquire the technical skills necessary for proficient reading, we also work to help children develop the confidence to take the risks needed to propel learning forward. Learning to read, like any human endeavor, requires practice, perseverance, and persistence to push through the challenges to proficiency.

One reason many children are not thriving as readers is that they have come to see themselves through their perceived deficits. You know these children. They are the ones who are too often pulled out for remediation just as we begin that beautiful read aloud or invite the other children to join us in a rich, whole-class reading experience.

This book is about how we can change the paradigm from deficit to strength. We are entering an age of participatory education in which everyone's voices should and can matter—including children's. We offer a different way to think about all children as readers, one that starts with the possible.

You'll close this book understanding:

- The hope and vision for what a super reader is and can be.
- The benefits of strength-based instruction using the 7 Strengths Model.
- The indispensable powers of reading and why every child should have them.
- The practical in-school and out-of-school strategies for helping all children become 365-day super readers.
- The formative assessments that allow you to measure to what extent students are grasping the big ideas they need to be successful.

Join us now to help the children in your life become super readers.

How This Book Is Organized

Every Child a Super Reader gives you all the background information you need to understand why our model works so well for children—and all the tools you need to implement the model. Chapter 1 explores the benefits of super reading and principles that undergird the development of super readers. Chapter 2 explains the 7 Strengths Model, the thinking behind it, and the power it holds to create super readers. Chapters 3 to 9 provide in-depth discussions of each strength, as well as strength-specific lessons and family guides. And, finally, Chapters 10 to 14 provide what you need to implement the model effectively—essential practices, assessment tools, and planning guidelines. (Find digital versions of assessment, management, and planning tools, as well as family guides, at scholastic.com/superreaderresources.)